

論文

Virginia Woolf's Vision in *To the Lighthouse*

(This article is dedicated to the late Prof. Nagamoto.)

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To the Lighthouse (1927) consists of three parts ; Part One "The Window", Part Two "Time Passes" and Part Three "The Lighthouse". Part I is set in Mr. Ramsay's summer house on the Isle of Skye in Scotland on a mid-September day just before the outbreak of the First World War. Part II is the brief description of the house during passing ten years of the war during which Mrs. Ramsay and Prue (the eldest daughter) die and Andrew (the eldest son) is killed in the war. Part III is set in the same place on a September day after the war. The reason this novel is titled "To the Lighthouse" is that the expedition to the Lighthouse planned in Part I is realized in Part III. In Part I we are introduced to the Ramsays and the people surrounding them who are spending their summer holiday in their summer house. Mr. Ramsay is an academic philosopher and he has eight children. The guests to their house are Mr. Bankes (a botanist), Mr. Carmichael (a poet), Lily Briscoe (an artist), Mr. Tansley (Mr. Ramsay's doctoral student) and two others.

One of the themes of this work is concerned with the two opposing views on life and these become evident in the very first two pages.

‘Yes, of course, if it’s fine tomorrow,’ said Mrs. Ramsay. ‘But you’ll have to be up with the lark,’ she added. (p.11)*¹

‘But,’ said his father, stopping in front of the drawing-room window, it won’t be fine.’ (12)

Mrs. Ramsay’s words give an extraordinary joy to her six-year-old son, James, who is sitting with her, because it seems to him the wonder which he has dreamed about for years will now come true. But Mr. Ramsay’s words excite in him a strong indignation.

Had there been an axe handy, a poker, or any weapon that would have gashed a hole in his father’s breast and killed him, there and then, James would have seized it. (12)

Mr. Ramsay values scientific facts and thinks that children should not be taught lies.

The extraordinary irrationality of her remark, the folly of women’s minds enraged him. He had ridden through the valley of death, been shattered and shivered; and now she flew in the face of facts, made his children hope what utterly out of the question, in effect, told lies. (53-4)

On the other hand, Mrs. Ramsay values emotional truth and thinks that children should be encouraged to have dreams. Although she thinks in this way, she says nothing outwardly:

To pursue truth with such astonishing lack of consideration for other people’s feelings, to rend the thin veils of civilisation so

wantonly, so brutally, was to her so horrible an outrage of human decency that without replying . . . she bent her head as if to let the pelt of jagged hail, the drench of dirty water, bespatter her unrebuked. There was nothing to be said. (54)

Mr. Ramsay is a typical Victorian patriarch, whereas Mrs. Ramsay is a typical Victorian woman, in the manner of 'the Angel in the House',^{* 2} an ideal which was much admired in Victorian days. In "Profession for Women" Woolf explains 'the Angel in the House' like this :

She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily.*³

Woolf also tells us that in order to be a writer she had to kill this idealized idea of woman.

In his childhood James cannot appreciate his father's attitude. But ten years later in Part III , when he is approaching the Lighthouse, he experiences a kind of revelation and realizes that both views are important.

James looked at the Lighthouse. He could see the white - washed rocks ; the tower, stark and straight ; he could see that it was barred with black and white . . . So that was the Lighthouse, was it? No, the other was also the Lighthouse. For nothing was simply one thing. The other was the Lighthouse too. It was sometimes hardly to be seen across the bay. In the evening one looked up and saw the eye opening and shutting and the light seemed to reach them in that airy sunny garden where they sat. (286)

So if we read this work from James' point of view, this is a story of growing-up of a child who has overcome his Oedipal Complex, finally accepting his father's view. As this novel is based on Woolf's childhood experiences, the Ramsays being modeled after her parents and the house after the family's summer house in St. Ives in Cornwall, it is possible to interpret it in this way. But we can also read it from Lily's point of view, because Lily's age(44 years old in Part III) is about the same as Woolf's herself at the time of writing this novel. In Part I the contrasting views between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay are represented clearly, and in Part III the unity between the two is achieved both literally and artistically, as Lily Briscoe, who begins to paint a picture of Mrs. Ramsay and James sitting at the drawing-room window in Part I, completes it in Part III. At the end of the novel she tells us 'I have had my vision.' (320) In Part III while Lily is painting, she is thinking of the dead Mrs. Ramsay and also thinking of Mr. Ramsay's voyage to the Lighthouse with James and Cam. In this sense this novel has a very solid structure. Part I and Part III are about the ordinary human world and Part II is about the background of the human world — that of impersonal and irrevocable time.

However the most impressive figure in the novel is Mrs. Ramsay, though she is an ordinary woman. She is depicted as a mystic and I think the representation of Mrs. Ramsay is one of the greatest achievements of the book. Mrs. Ramsay is a housewife and mother and her husband relies on her spiritually. Mr. Ramsay always demands sympathy from his wife.

So boasting of her capacity to surround and protect, there was scarcely a shell of herself left for her to know herself by; all was so lavished

and James, as he stood stiff between her knees, felt her rise in a rosy-flowered fruit tree laid with leaves and dancing boughs into which the beak of brass, the arid scimitar of his father, the egotistical man, plunged and smote, demanding sympathy. (63)

This fecundity in Mrs. Ramsay comes from her mystic moments in which she identifies with some unknown force underlying life. Such moments give her the sense of the true Self which is far larger than the Ego which forms our consciousness.

She could be herself, by herself. And that was what now she often felt the need of — to think; well not even to think. To be silent; to be alone. All the being and the doing, expansive, glittering, vocal, evaporated; and one shrunk, with a sense of solemnity, to being oneself, a wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others. Although she continued to knit, and sat upright, it was thus that she felt herself; and this self having shed its attachments was free for the strangest adventures. When life sank down for a moment, the range of experience seemed limitless. (99)

In this solitude she identifies herself with the third stroke of the Lighthouse, the long steady stroke, the last of the three strokes. In such a state some words come up to her lips like "Children don't forget". In the last moment she adds, "We are in the hands of the Lord." But immediately after saying it she tries to deny it, because she doesn't believe in God within her consciousness. As she perceives a lot of misery existing in this world, she finds she cannot believe in God. Her idea of life is rather pessimistic and out of this pessimism comes her

benevolence and love. The scene of her utmost solitude when she identifies herself with the stroke of the Lighthouse reminds me of the Oriental idea of 'Big Self' (TAIGA). In the East we distinguish between 'Small Self' (SHOUGA) and 'Big Self'. If we use the psychological terms, the former will be the Ego and the latter will be the Self. Through her novels Woolf attempts to tell us what the true Self is and she criticizes egoism which, according to her, is a male characteristic.

During the dinner Mrs. Ramsay tries to make people come together and be happy and she succeeds in creating one everlasting moment.

Nothing need be said; nothing could be said. There it was, all round them. It partook, she felt, carefully helping Mr. Bankes to a specially tender piece, of eternity; as she had already felt about something different once before that afternoon; there is a coherence in things, a stability; something, she meant, is immune from change, and shines out (she glanced at the window with its ripple of reflected lights) in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral, like a ruby. (163)

Of course the defects of Mrs. Ramsay such as a passion for matchmaking, a tendency to respect men, etc. are depicted through other people's eyes. However the greatest emphasis is laid on her creativity like that of an artist in being able to make some important moment stand still. She is a so-called artist in life. In Part III Lily recollects this ability in Mrs. Ramsay and appreciates it.

But what a power was in the human soul! she thought. That woman sitting there . . . made these angers, irritations fall off like old rags; she brought together this and then this, and so made out of that miserable silliness and spite . . . something — this scene on the beach

for example, this moment of friendship and liking — which survived, after all these years, complete . . . and it stayed in the mind almost like a work of art. (248—9)

Following this scene Lily ponders the question of the meaning of life.

What is the meaning of life? That was all . . . a simple question; one that tended to close in on one with years. The great revelation perhaps never did come. Instead there were little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark; here was one. This, that and the other; herself and Charles Tansley and the breaking wave; Mrs. Ramsay bringing them together; Mrs. Ramsay saying "Life stand still here"; Mrs. Ramsay making of the moment something permanent . . . In the midst of chaos there was shape; this eternal passing and flowing . . . was struck into stability. (249—50)

I think this passage suggests to us the essence of what Woolf tries to convey through her writings. That is to say, Woolf tries to tell us what the meaning of life is for her, and it is, as we can suspect from the following excerpt from her diary which was written when she was writing *To the Lighthouse*, the sense of transience of life and the endless search for an order to the chaos.

Yet I have some restless searcher in me. Why is there not a discovery in life? Something one can lay hands on and say "This is it"? My depression is a harassed feeling. I'm looking; but that's not it — that's not it. What is it? And shall I die before I find it? Then (as I was walking through Russell Square last night) I see the mountains in the sky: the great clouds; and the moon which is risen over Persia; I have a great and astonishing sense of

something there, which is "it". It is not exactly beauty that I mean. It is that the thing is in itself enough: satisfactory; achieved. A sense of my own strangeness, walking on the earth is there too: of the infinite oddity of the human position; trotting along Russell Square with the moon up there and those mountain clouds. Who am I, what am I, and so on: these questions are always floating about me . . .^{*5}

Woolf expresses her own idea of life through Mrs. Ramsay's and Lily's consciousness. Mrs. Ramsay is the typical Victorian housewife who is criticized by Woolf as 'the Angel in the House' in her essay, but at the same time she is the idealized being who has a mystical power to unite people through the power of the love.

Arnold Kettle points out that there is something missing in *To the Lighthouse*, although he admits her achievement in writing a new kind of novel which went against the conventions of naturalistic writing.

The trouble with *To the Lighthouse*, it seems to me, is the quite simple and quite fundamental trouble that it is, when all is said, not about anything very interesting or important.*⁶

And after quoting a passage from D. S. Savage which points out that the distinguishing feature of V. Woolf's conception of life lies in its passivity, he concludes as follows :

Upon what is this subtle apparatus of sensibility after all exercised? Upon what vision of the world, what scale of human values, is it based? What is lacking in *To the Lighthouse* is a basic conflict, a framework of human effort. What does Lily Briscoe's vision really amount to? In what sense is the episode in the boat between James and Mr. Ramsay really a culmination of their earlier relationship? *⁷

In other word, in *To the Lighthouse* Kettle cannot find any moral conflict such as is usually found in many of the realistic novels and he argues that Lily's (the writer's) vision is not persuasive enough. However I would oppose his first view that there is no conflict in this novel, because I believe there is a kind of conflict here between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, though it is rather static. As the conflict is represented through their consciousness, it may puzzle those who are accustomed to reading traditional novels such as Victorian novels. I agree with his second view that Lily's vision is not persuasive enough, because Lily's attitude to Mrs. Ramsay is rather ambivalent. This is also Woolf's attitude. Lily (Woolf) appreciates Mrs. Ramsay's goodness, but also is critical about her idea of women. Here is Woolf's dilemma. Woolf retains the dual views on life — one masculine and the other feminine and tries to admit both views just like James in the novel. As a writer she has to struggle against the idea of the ideal woman, but at the bottom of her heart she cannot help admiring such a woman.

Woolf was very conscious of the woman question, as she was writing at the time when the Suffrage Movement was most active. For example, in *A Room of One's Own* (1929) Woolf writes about the problem women writers confront. However Woolf's final conclusion may be said to be problematic. From Chapter 1 to Chapter 5 Woolf points out various problems which prevent women writers from writing good novels and she makes perverse and critical as well as humourous remarks aimed at men who have political and economic power and believe in the superiority of the male sex. However in Chapter 6 she tries to overcome this conflict between male and female, using the metaphor of the married couple and the concept of androgyny of the mind. She advises us that, as the mind is androgenous, we should write novels as manly-women

or womanly-men if we want to write acceptable ones. As a woman writer writing in the tradition of male novelists, this attitude seems to work as a good strategy, but at the same time the same attitude obscures the critical point of Woolf's novels. As Elaine Showalter points out, Woolf evades the explicit confrontation with the authoritative male powers in her novels. In *Three Guineas* (1938) Woolf tries to confront them courageously, but her voice sounds rather hysterical.

Woolf represents two views on life in *To the Lighthouse*, one the masculine view which is scientific, logical and egotistic and the other the feminine view which is emotional, illogical, selfless and intuitive. There is basically no problem about her conclusion that both views are important. However it could be said that the conclusion is not persuasive enough, because Woolf herself believes this only as an ideal. James and Cam can forgive the father's sin even though it has caused a trauma in their childhood. Woolf, on the other hand, is haunted by it all through her life. It sometimes leads her to the verge of madness but gives her the energy to continue to write many novels, struggling between two disparate urges, to write as honestly as she can and to write an artistically well-balanced novel.

— Notes —

- * 1. Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (London, Hogarth Press, 1967) I will only put the page number in the parentheses after any further quotation from the text.
- * 2. 'The Angel in the House' is originally the title of Coventry Patmore's long poem which consists of 4 parts and was published from 1845 — 1863.
- * 3. Virginia Woolf, *Collected Essays*, Vol. II, ed. Leonard Woolf (London, Chatto & Windus, 1966), p. 285.

- * 4 . cf. *To the Lighthouse*, p. 40.
- * 5 . Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*, ed. Leonard Woolf (London, Hogarth Press, 1953), p.86.
- * 6 . Arnold Kettle, *An Introduction to the English Novel*, Vol. II (London, Hutchinson U. P., 1953), reprint. Kinokunia Tokyo, Kinokunia, 1961, p. 104.
- * 7 . Ibid, p. 105.
- * 8 . cf. Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*, Chapter 10 (Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton U. P., 1977).